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**The Weimar Triangle
and the future of the West**

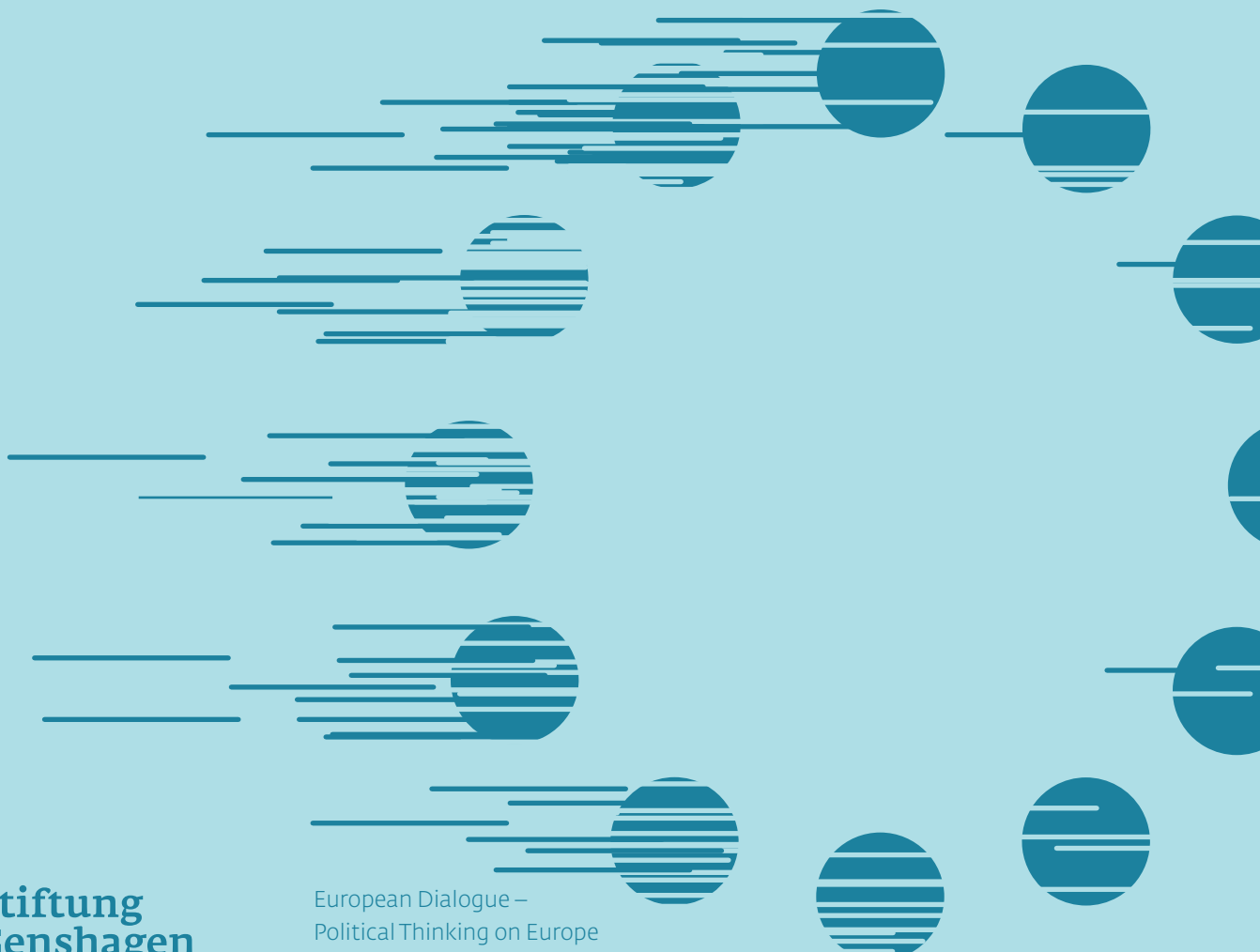


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Executive summary

This paper discusses debates about the crisis of the West through the prism of the Weimar Triangle, which neatly illustrates some of the different ways in which this crisis is perceived. To begin with, there is little agreement about how to understand the crisis of the West – which, in turn, has to do with the lack of clarity and consensus about what the »West« is. There are at least five different concepts of the West that it is necessary to differentiate: a geographic concept, a developmental or technological concept, a strategic concept, a normative concept, and a cultural or civilizational concept. Much of the current discussion revolves around what the West should stand for – and, in particular, whether it should be understood in normative or cultural or civilizational terms.

The crisis of the West can also be understood in terms of a threat from without or from within. In other words, the debate about the crisis of the West can be said to have an internal and an external dimension. Many commentators, including those who describe themselves as »liberal« and those who think of themselves as being »illiberal«, argue that, in the three decades since the end of the Cold War, a moderate or restrained form of liberalism has given way to a much more extreme or unrestrained one. However, although many commentators agree that liberalism has gone too far, they differ on how exactly it has done so in ways that correspond to some of the various meanings of »liberalism«. Liberal overreach in particular can be understood in cultural, economic or political terms.

Intra-European differences and especially the differences between and within the Weimar countries will also remain important as far as the future of the West is concerned. Each of the three Weimar countries has a different relationship with the US and has responded differently to the election of President Donald Trump and the uncertainty about the US security guarantee to Europe. We can think of the three countries as lying on a spectrum from Atlanticist to »post-Atlanticist«. At the Atlanticist end is Poland, which has sought to strengthen relations with the US under President Trump. At the »post-Atlanticist« end is France, which has promoted the concept of European »strategic autonomy«. Germany, which is divided between Atlanticists and »post-Atlanticists«, is committed to the development of European defence cooperation while remaining sceptical about the idea of »strategic autonomy«.

On the basis of the fault lines discussed in this paper, it is possible to imagine four scenarios for the future of the West: the West survives, Europe becomes »autonomous«, the West fragments, and the »alt-West« emerges. Whatever the outcome of the U.S. presidential election in November, many of the existing challenges in the Transatlantic relationship will remain. In particular, there is a new consensus in the United States around an approach to China based on the idea of »strategic competition«. A particularly important area is European security. France and Poland need to overcome their differences while together helping Germany to go beyond rhetoric about »taking its destiny into its own hands« and make a greater commitment to European security.

Introduction

There is a widespread perception that the West is going through a kind of crisis. During the last decade, there has been an increasing sense of anxiety among foreign policy analysts in Europe and the US about the shift in the distribution of power away from the West that was taking place. However, in the last few years, and especially since the election of Donald Trump as US President in November 2016, there has also been an increasing sense that the West is not just facing external challenges, but that it is also going through a kind of internal crisis. Increasing internal divisions, both within Europe and between Europe and the US, are, in turn, undermining the ability of Europe and the US to respond to the external challenges they face – in particular from China and Russia.

This paper explores the crisis of the West, and in particular the role of the Weimar Triangle – i.e. France, Germany and Poland – in it. It is useful to examine the crisis of the West through the prism of the Weimar countries because the differences between them neatly illustrate the different ways in which the crisis is perceived. Based on their different geographies and histories, each has a different relationship with the US and has responded in different ways to Trump's election and the uncertainty about the US security guarantee to Europe that it has created. These differences illustrate that transatlantic rifts always have an intra-European dimension. We argue that these differences between the Weimar countries will need to be overcome if the West wants to remain a coherent unit in the future.

The first section of this paper explores the debate about the crisis of the West and argues that it is necessary to differentiate between five different concepts of the West. The second section examines the »internal« dimension of the crisis of the West and, in particular, different versions of the idea of »liberal overreach«. The third section discusses the »external« dimension of the crisis of the West and, in particular, the shift in the distribution of power in international politics, how this is changing US foreign policy and the implications for the transatlantic relationship. The fourth section touches on the different relationships of the three Weimar countries to the US and how they have responded to Trump's election. Based on the fault lines discussed earlier in the paper, the fifth section proposes some possible scenarios for the future of the West. The sixth and seventh sections deal with recent developments in transatlantic relations (especially in the light of the upcoming US presidential elections) and the perspectives for European security respectively.

I. What crisis of the West?

Although there is a widespread sense that the West is going through a crisis, there is little agreement about how to understand this crisis – which, in turn, has to do with the lack of clarity and consensus about what the »West« is. In policy debates, this term is often used imprecisely and is rarely defined. There are, however, at least five different concepts of the West that it is necessary to differentiate: a geographic concept, a developmental or technological concept, a strategic concept, a normative concept, and a cultural or civilizational concept. Distinguishing between these different concepts helps us understand more clearly the current debate about the crisis and to avoid circular discussions in which participants talk past each other because they understand the West in different ways.¹

The most straightforward concept of the West is a geographic one. In this sense, the West refers quite simply to Europe and North America as distinct from the rest of the world and, in particular, from the »Global South«. (Of course, this concept is not entirely coherent or logical – after all, South America is geographically as far west as North America, but is usually thought of as being part of the »Global South«.) When the West is defined in this way, being »pro-Western« simply means pursuing the interests of Europe and North America. Understood in this geographic sense, the West is clearly in relative decline as a long-term power transition away from Europe and the US takes place.

The second version is developmental or technological – the West as a group of »advanced« or »developed« economies. This version of the West also includes countries that are outside the geographic West, such as Australia, Israel, Japan and South Korea. The embodiment of this developmental or technological version of the West is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which includes 36 countries

from around the world. However, the distinction between the West defined in this way and the rest of the world is becoming increasingly blurred as much of the non-Western world catches up in developmental and technological terms.

The third version is strategic – the West as the alliance system formed after the Second World War in response to the threat to western Europe from the Soviet Union and embodied by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In this version, as in the geographic version, the West is defined narrowly as Europe and North America, though it is sometimes implicitly extended to include US allies elsewhere in the world – in practice, many of the same countries that are also included in the developmental or technological version of the West. This idea of the West was becoming less significant after the end of the Cold War, but has been revived in recent years in response to a renewed perception of threat from Russia and the rise of China.

The fourth version of the West is normative – a set of values that goes back to the European Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions at the end of the 18th century. The German historian Heinrich August Winkler has written eloquently about this »normative project of the West«.² Supporters of this idea of the West usually identify democracy, human rights and the rule of law as the key elements of this normative project – which they see as being under threat both from within and without the geographic West. Much of the current discussion about the crisis of the West, particularly among foreign policy think tanks in Europe and the US, focuses on this normative version, though few analysts distinguish between this version of the West and the geographic, developmental and strategic concepts of

¹ For an alternative typology, see Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff, *Die Welt braucht den Westen: Neustart für eine liberale Ordnung*, Hamburg: Edition Körber, 2019, pp. 28 et seq.

² See for example Heinrich August Winkler, *Greatness and Limits of the West. The History of an Unfinished Project* (First Annual Ralf Dahrendorf Memorial Lecture), London: London School of Economics, 7 October 2010, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/LEQS/LEQSPaper30.pdf>, retrieved on 7 July 2020.

the West. For example, they often elide the strategic interests of Europe and the US with the normative version of the West.

The fifth version of the West is a cultural or civilizational one. According to this way of thinking, the West should be understood as a particular (rather than universal) project based on Christian (or in some versions »Judeo-Christian«) civilization or values. This cultural or civilizational idea of the West is influenced by Samuel Huntington's notion of a post-Cold War »clash of civilizations«. However, it has been promoted in recent years above all by the far right in Europe and the US. President Trump's speech in Warsaw in 2017 is often seen as an expression of this vision of the West.³ Importantly, when the West is defined in this way, it can include Russia, which is usually seen as challenging the normative and strategic West – but not China, which is understood as part of a separate Confucian culture or civilization.

To a large extent, the current debate about the West is between supporters of the normative and cultural or civilizational versions of the West – each of which are equally convinced that they are defending the »real« West against those on the other side of the debate who are trying to destroy it. In particular, the debate is between supporters of the normative idea of the West, who tend to be centrists in Europe and Democrats in the US, and proponents of the cultural or civilizational idea of the West, who tend to be on the right in Europe and Republicans in the US.⁴ Both sides of this argument try to link it with the idea of the West as a strategic project. Thus much of the current discussion about the future of NATO revolves around what it, and the West,

should stand for – and in particular whether it should be understood in normative or cultural or civilizational terms.

Supporters of the »normative« version of the West like to think of the cultural or civilizational idea of the West – which they identify with an »illiberal« alliance between Russia and »populist« parties within the geographic West – as a radical break with, or attack on, the West as a normative project. Many foreign policy analysts in Europe and the US even suggest that this cultural or civilizational project stands for the opposite of the normative project of the West – Tobias Bunde has termed this the »anti-West«, for example.⁵ This is an oversimplification, however. The reality is that there is no clear dividing line between the normative and the cultural or civilizational concepts of the West. This is because the »universal« values that are central to the normative project emerged from a specific cultural context – though this does not mean they cannot be embraced by people elsewhere in the world.

The idea of the West as cultural or civilizational has been part of the strategic project of the West from its beginnings in the 1940s. Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff writes that President Donald Trump's attempt to redefine the purpose of NATO in civilizational terms would be »a fundamental reinterpretation of its essential core«. ⁶ Yet the North Atlantic Treaty – the foundational document of the strategic West – also included the concept of »civilization«, which it elided with a normative idea of the West. It states: »The Parties to this Treaty [...] are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual

³ Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland, Warsaw, 6 July 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-people-poland/>, retrieved on 7 July 2020.

⁴ For an excellent discussion of the evolution of the American right, see Maya Kandel, *Le conservatisme national américain, Le débat*, no. 208 (2020/1), pp. 30–41.

⁵ Tobias Bunde, *Was ist der Westen? Die liberale Ordnung muss neu begründet werden*, *Tagesspiegel*, 16 February 2020, <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/was-ist-der-westen-die-liberale-ordnung-muss-neu-begrundet-werden/25539112.html>, retrieved on 7 July 2020. Bunde refers to a »Gegen-Westen«, or »anti-West«.

⁶ Kleine-Brockhoff, *Die Welt braucht den Westen* (see footnote 1), p. 33.

liberty and the rule of law.»⁷ In other words, Trump's vision of the West does not represent such a radical break with the history of the West as a strategic community as some foreign policy analysts suggest.

Some supporters of the normative project also try to differentiate their idea of the West from the cultural or civilizational concept of the West by claiming that, whereas their own idea of the West is based on »values«, the cultural or civilizational model is not. For example, Constanze Stelzenmüller writes that this alternative vision of the West »is not so much based on values and rules as on a common »civilization« rooted in Judeo-Christian religion«. ⁸ But this too can be questioned. After all, those who understand the West in cultural or civilizational terms also talk about values. The difference between the normative and cultural or civilizational ideas of the West is about which values exactly one should associate with the West and where they come from. In short, what »Western values« are is itself contested.

⁷ The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington, DC, 4 April 1949, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm, retrieved on 7 July 2020.

⁸ Constanze Stelzenmüller, Hostile ally: The Trump challenge and Europe's inadequate response, Washington DC: Brookings Institution, August 2019, p. 12, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP_20190905_hostile_ally.pdf, retrieved on 7 July 2020.

II. The internal dimension

In discussing the crisis, it is possible to emphasise either that the West is being threatened from within or from without. In other words, the crisis of the West can be said to have both an internal and an external dimension. The »internal« dimension refers to the perception that something has gone wrong within the geographic West – that is, Europe and the US. The »external« dimension refers to the perception that the geographic West is being challenged from outside, and in particular by China and Russia. The debate about both dimensions of the crisis of the West is connected to debates about liberalism. In fact, the concepts of the West and liberalism are so closely related to each other that it is almost impossible to separate them.

However, like the idea of the West, liberalism has multiple meanings. Foreign policy analysts in Europe and the US often tend to think of themselves as »liberal«, and in particular as defenders of the »liberal international order«, which is in turn often conflated with the West through phrases such as the »Western-led order« and the »Western system«. ⁹ Foreign policy analysts also describe both external actors like China and Russia and those within Europe and the US who believe in the cultural or civilizational idea of the West, such as Trump or Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, as »illiberal«. ¹⁰ Putin has also declared liberalism »obsolete«, and Orbán has explicitly embraced the

⁹ On foreign policy analysts and the »liberal international order«, see for example Thomas Wright, *The Return to Great-Power Rivalry Was Inevitable*, *The Atlantic* (Online), 12 September 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/09/liberal-international-order-free-world-trump-authoritarianism/569881/>, retrieved on 7 July 2020; Bunde, *Was ist der Westen?* (see footnote 5). For examples of the use of phrases such as »Western-led order« and »Western system«, see Bruce Jones, *Still Ours to Lead: America, Rising Powers, and the Tension between Rivalry and Restraint*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2014; G. John Ikenberry, *The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?* *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (January - February 2008), pp. 23–37.

¹⁰ On »illiberal« threats to the West, see for example Kleine-Brockhoff, *Die Welt braucht den Westen* (see footnote 1), pp. 28 et seq.; Gideon Rachman, *Viktor Orbán's illiberal world*, *Financial Times* (Online), 30 July 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/bbdb6b6f-c12a-3b38-95d2-0244260ce753>, retrieved on 7 July 2020.

term »illiberal«. ¹¹ All of this gives the impression that a straightforward struggle between »liberalism« and »illiberalism« is taking place. The reality is more complicated, however, because different participants use the concept of »liberalism« in different ways.

In particular, liberalism can be understood in cultural, economic or political terms. While these different ideas of liberalism sometimes go together, this is not always the case. In particular, some authoritarian or »populist« figures, movements and parties are often described as »illiberal« in political terms, but are actually rather liberal in economic terms. The Polish Law and Justice Party (PiS) is an interesting example here. Although it is often described as being »illiberal« in its cultural or political outlook, it is generally seen as »liberal« in economic terms, especially when it comes to EU policies. ¹² Indeed, PiS has opposed what it sees as French President Emmanuel Macron's »protectionism« – in other words, economic illiberalism. ¹³ This illustrates how the multiple meanings of »liberalism« make it difficult to divide political actors neatly into those who are »liberal« and those who are »illiberal«.

¹¹ On Putin see Lionel Barber/Henry Foy/Alex Barker, *Vladimir Putin says liberalism has become obsolete*, *Financial Times* (Online), 28 June 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36>, retrieved on 7 July 2020. On Orbán, see the website of the Hungarian Government, *Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Speech at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp*, 26 July 2014, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-25th-balvanyos-summer-free-university-and-student-camp>, retrieved on 7 July 2020.

¹² The Law and Justice Party has, however, been critical of »neoliberalism«. See Henry Foy, *Poland vows to end free market approach despite economic gains*, *Financial Times* (Online), 9 June 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/6a702384-2e49-11e6-bf8d-26294ad519fc>, retrieved on 7 July 2020.

¹³ See for example Emre Peker/Stacy Meichtry, *Macron's EU Agenda Meets Stiff Resistance*, *Wall Street Journal* (Online), 23 June 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/macrons-eu-agenda-meets-stiff-resistance-1498243462>, retrieved on 7 July 2020; Polish PM accuses Macron of pursuing »protectionism« in EU, *Euractiv*, 7 September 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/polish-pm-accuses-macron-of-pursuing-protectionism-in-eu/>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

An alternative way of thinking about the internal dimension of the crisis of the West may be the idea of »liberal overreach«. A variety of commentators, including those who describe themselves as »liberal« and those who describe themselves as being »illiberal«, argue that, in the three decades since the end of the Cold War, a moderate or restrained form of liberalism has given way to a much more extreme or unrestrained one. Some such as Kleine-Brockhoff explicitly use the concept of »liberal overreach«. ¹⁴ Others use different terms for the same phenomenon – John Gray, for example, calls this »hyper-liberalism«. ¹⁵ However, although many commentators agree that liberalism has gone too far, they differ on how exactly it has done so in ways that correspond to some of the various meanings of »liberalism«. In particular, liberal overreach can be understood in cultural, economic or political terms.

The cultural version of the liberal overreach argument centres on the idea that, since the 1960s, progressive value change has gone too far. ¹⁶ Many who identify this kind of liberal overreach focus in particular on issues such as gender equality and same-sex marriage, which they see as undermining the traditional family, and on immigration and multiculturalism, which they believe threaten mainstream or traditional cultures – in other words, the issues at the centre of what in the US is called the »culture war«. At the same time, some also argue that freedom of speech – which is often understood as a key »Western value« – is being restricted in the name of political correctness or a kind of »progressive intolerance«. ¹⁷ With respect to ideology,

¹⁴ See Kleine-Brockhoff, *Die Welt braucht den Westen* (see footnote 5), chapter 5.

¹⁵ John Gray, *The problem of hyper-liberalism*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 30 March 2018. See also *Nie ma już liberalnego świata. Wracamy do chaosu*, z Johnem Grayem rozmawia Łukasz Pawłowski, *Kultura Liberalna*, 8 May 2018, <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2018/05/08/nie-ma-juz-liberalnego-swiatea-wracamy-do-chaosu/>, retrieved on 7 July 2020.

¹⁶ See for example David Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*, London: Hurst, 2017.

¹⁷ See for example Gray, *The problem of hyper-liberalism* (see footnote 15),

the idea of liberal overreach in cultural terms comes from across the political spectrum, but from the centre right and far right in particular. ¹⁸ Geographically speaking, it tends to come from the eastern part of Europe – in the case of the Weimar counties, from Poland. ¹⁹

The economic version of the liberal overreach arguments centres on the notion that, since the »neoliberal turn« in the mid-1970s, states have gone too far in cutting taxes, deregulating their economies and removing barriers to the movement of capital and goods, which has dramatically increased inequality. This argument often overlaps with critiques of »hyper-globalisation« – i.e. the more extreme form of globalisation since the end of the Cold War. ²⁰ Ideologically speaking, the idea of liberal overreach in economic terms tends to come from the far left and the far right (though, as discussed above, there are also some figures, parties and movements that are generally

who focuses on what he sees as restrictions on freedom of speech on university campuses. Arguing along similar lines, Timothy Garton Ash speaks of a kind of »illiberal liberalism«. See Timothy Garton Ash, *What went wrong with liberalism? And what should liberals do about it?* (2018 Political Quarterly Lecture), London, 18 May 2018, <http://www.politicalquarterly.org.uk/2018/03/what-went-wrong-with-liberalism-and.html>, retrieved on 7 July 2020.

¹⁸ Although arguments against liberal overreach in cultural terms are associated with the centre right and far right, more centrist figures also argue that overreach in cultural terms can be damaging. See for example Edward Luce, *US liberal over-reach on gender identity risks benefiting Trump*, *Financial Times* (Online), 6 June 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/065210fo-87f2-11e9-a028-86cea8523dc2>, retrieved on 7 July 2020. Some on the left also make versions of this argument. In particular, they criticise the left's focus on »identity politics«. See for example Mark Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*, New York: Harper Collins, 2017.

¹⁹ See for example Agnieszka Kołakowska in: *Woja kulturowa i inne wojny*, Warszawa: Teologia Polityczna 2015; Jacek Żakowski, Prof. Marcin Król o tym, że czeka nas koniec starego świata, *Polityka*, 1 January 2019, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1776746,1.prof-marcin-krol-o-tym-ze-czeka-nas-koniec-starego-swiatea.read>, retrieved on 7 July 2020. For a Polish critique of the liberal approach to culture and sexuality, see Ryszard Legutko, *The Demon in Democracy. Totalitarian Temptation in Free Societies*, New York: Encounter Books, 2016, pp. 129–170.

²⁰ On »hyper-globalisation«, see Dani Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox. Democracy and the Future of the World Economy*, New York: Norton, 2010.

seen as being on the far right that are actually rather liberal as far as economic policy is concerned). In geographic terms, this tends to come from the south of Europe – in the case of the Weimar countries, from France, where the left has long been suspicious of what is sometimes referred to as ultralibéralisme.

A third version of liberal overreach is political. Those who describe themselves as liberal often think of political liberalism as a straightforward synonym for »democracy«. However, the model of liberal democracy that has gradually emerged in Europe and the US since the 18th century is actually a combination of two different elements that are in constant tension with each other – a system of individual rights guaranteed by a constitution (liberalism) and popular sovereignty (democracy). Thus rather than being synonymous, political liberalism and democracy actually constrain each other. Those who believe that liberalism has overreached in political terms argue that the constitutional pillar of liberal democracy has increasingly displaced the popular pillar, and in so doing has undermined the ability of the people to make collective choices.

There is a right-wing and a left-wing version of this third political idea of liberal overreach. The right-wing version is closely related to the cultural idea of liberal overreach. The argument here is that unelected judges have gone too far in enforcing progressive cultural norms that do not reflect popular preferences.²¹ Meanwhile, the left-wing version is closely related to the

economic idea of liberal overreach. Here, the argument is that, in the context of »hyper-globalisation«, the expansion of rules has taken important elements of economic policy out of the realm of democratic contestation and restricted the ability of states to pursue democratically legitimated economic policies.²² On both the left and the right, some see the European Union as a particularly extreme example of a wider shift from the popular to the constitutional pillar of liberal democracy or the replacement of politics by law – which is sometimes referred to as »undemocratic liberalism«.²³

These different versions of liberal overreach are important for debates about the crisis of the West because they provide competing explanations for the current internal crisis in Europe and the US – and also implicitly point to different ways in which the West can be strengthened internally. However, no matter how one understands the internal crisis within Europe and the US – and in particular whichever way one thinks liberalism has »overreached« – this is also taking place in a broader global context in which power is shifting from West to East. This global context interacts with the internal aspects of the crisis of the West in certain complex ways. We turn to this external dimension of the crisis of the West in the next section.

²¹ See for example the commentary on the interpretation of the ruling on the recognition of marriages of same-sex couples entered into abroad, published by conservative Polish judicial organisation Ordo Iuris. Bartosz Zalewski, Komentarz do wyroku Wojewódzkiego Sądu Administracyjnego w Warszawie z 8 stycznia 2019 r., sygn. akt IV SA/Wa 2618/18, 12 February 2019, <https://ordoiuris.pl/rodzina-i-malzenstwo/komentarz-do-wyroku-wojewodzkiego-sadu-administracyjnego-w-warszawie-z-8>, retrieved on 13 July 2020. See also an essay by legal scholar Andrzej Bryk, Jakby przed nami nie było niczego, Rzeczpospolita (Online), 3 March 2020, <https://www.rp.pl/Rzecz-o-prawie/303039998-Andrzej-Bryk-jakby-przed-nami-nie-bylo-niczego.html>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

²² On how the expansion of rules in the context of »hyper-globalisation« can undermine democracy, see also Hans Kundnani, When the rules won't bend, *The World Today*, August/September 2018, p. 23, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/twt/when-rules-won-t-bend>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

²³ On »constitutionalisation« in the EU and its implications for democracy, see Dieter Grimm, The Democratic Costs of Constitutionalisation: The European Case, *European Law Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (July 2015), pp. 460–473. On the idea of the EU as a case of »undemocratic liberalism«, see Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy. Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018, Chapter 2.

III.

The external dimension

As with the internal dimension, discussions about this external dimension of the West also tend to merge with discussions of liberalism – in particular through the idea of the «liberal international order».²⁴ The liberal international order can also be understood as «liberal» in multiple ways based on the different meanings of the concept. In particular, it can be understood as being liberal in a political sense (i.e. in opposition to authoritarianism), an economic sense (in opposition to economic nationalism or mercantilism) or an international relations sense (in opposition to realism and other theories of international relations). China and Russia are often seen as challenging the liberal international order. Supporters of the idea of a liberal international order have increasingly come to see China, a rising peer competitor to the US, as a particular threat to it.²⁵

At the same time, some foreign policy analysts have also seen yet another kind of liberal overreach – with «liberalism» understood, in this case, in the international relations sense of the term.²⁶ Since the end of the Cold War, the «liberal international order» has become more liberal inasmuch as that the sovereignty of nation states has been constrained or undermined in various ways – for example through the development of World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, ideas such as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and humanitarian (or

simply liberal) interventionism and new institutions such as the International Criminal Court.²⁷ However, some foreign policy analysts and «realist» international relations theorists argue that this led to an inevitable backlash from outside the West – in particular from China and Russia.²⁸

Perhaps the biggest factor in international politics that is changing the position of Europe and the US, and the relationship between them, is the long-term power transition from West to East and South. Europe and the US are declining in relative terms as non-Western powers – above all China – rise. The question is whether this shift in the global distribution of power is a threat to the West – and if so, in what way. Again, this depends on how one understands the concept of the West. Some simply see the shift in the balance of power as a threat to the economic interests of Europe and the US. Others interpret it as a threat to the West defined in strategic terms while some continue to view this as a challenge to the normative project of the West or to Western «civilisation».

Against this backdrop, US foreign policy has become increasingly focused on China's rise during the last decade. This shift in US foreign policy began during the Obama administration, which sought to «pivot» or «rebalance» towards the Asia-Pacific region, which it recognised was becoming increasingly vital to international politics and to the global economy.²⁹ In response to concerns in Europe that the US was withdrawing from the continent, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton sought to reassure Europeans that

²⁴ On the idea of the «liberal international order», see Hans Kundnani, *What is the Liberal International Order?* Washington, DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMFUS), May 2017, <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/what-liberal-international-order>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

²⁵ See for example Ikenberry, *The Rise of China and the Future of the West* (see footnote no. 9); G. John Ikenberry, *The Future of the Liberal World Order*, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (May/June 2011), pp. 56-68, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2011-05-01/future-liberal-world-order>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

²⁶ See for example Hal Brands, *American Grand Strategy and the Liberal Order*, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2016, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE200/PE209/RAND_PE209.pdf, retrieved on 13 July 2020. Brands argues that liberal overreach began in the «unipolar moment» after the end of the Cold War as the US sought to spread democracy, markets and human rights. This approach culminated in the George W. Bush administration.

²⁷ See Kundnani, *What is the Liberal International Order?* (see footnote 24).

²⁸ See for example John Mearsheimer, *Bound to Fail. The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order*, *International Security*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Spring 2019), pp. 7–50, https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/International%20Security_Bound%20to%20Fail.pdf, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

²⁹ See Hillary Clinton, *America's Pacific Century*, *Foreign Policy* (Online), 11 October 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

the US was not »pivoting« away from Europe, but rather wanted Europeans to engage more in Asia along with the US.³⁰ The administration made attempts, led by Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, to develop a joint transatlantic approach to Asia.

Following the Ukraine crisis in 2014, the US also refocused on Europe. In particular, it redeployed significant military resources to NATO's eastern flank as part of the European Reassurance Initiative – in effect, a partial reversal of the »pivot« took place. In February 2016, US spending on the initiative was quadrupled to 3.4 billion US dollars. The US also agreed to deploy an armoured brigade consisting of 4000 troops to Poland as part of the Enhanced Forward Presence, which was agreed at the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016. At the same time, however, there was also some frustration within the Obama administration about Europe's inability to deal more effectively with its own problems. In particular, Obama implicitly criticised European »free riding«.³¹

The Trump administration has taken a different approach. During the election campaign in 2016, Trump made confusing and contradictory statements about NATO, claiming, among other things, that it »may be obsolete« and that he would »certainly look at« getting rid of it.³² He also said that he would decide whether to come to the aid of NATO countries attacked by Russia only if they had »fulfilled their

obligations to us«.³³ His election as President therefore immediately created profound uncertainty about the US security guarantee to Europe. This uncertainty has remained, and has increased following Trump's decision to withdraw troops from Germany. However, even if Trump is re-elected as president in November and the withdrawal goes ahead, he will remain constrained by a pro-NATO Congress.

The focus on China in US foreign policy has increased further since Trump became President. Trump has taken a much more aggressive approach to China, but has broken with the strategy begun by the Obama administration – in particular by withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement that was a key element of Obama's »pivot«. Instead, he has sought to radically change the economic relationship between China and the US by taking a protectionist approach to trade with China. At the same time, he has also abandoned efforts to work with European allies on Asia policy – and even imposed tariffs on imports of steel aluminium from the EU as well as from China in March 2018. After it failed to secure an exemption from the tariffs, the EU imposed retaliatory tariffs on US products in June 2018.

In this context, many Europeans increasingly feel abandoned by the US – or even see it as a threat to Europe comparable to that posed by China or Russia. The withdrawal of the US from the Iran nuclear deal and the imposition of new economic sanctions that would affect European companies continuing to do business in Iran led to outrage in Europe and

³⁰ See for example Clinton's remarks at the Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 29 November 2012, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/20121129_transatlantic_clinton.pdf, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

³¹ See Jeffrey Goldberg, The Obama Doctrine, *The Atlantic* (Online), April 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

³² CNN, Complete Donald Trump Interview: NATO, Nukes, Muslim World, and Clinton, 23 March 2016, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/videos/2016-03-23/complete-trump-interview-nato-nukes-muslims-and-hillary>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

³³ Maggie Haberman/David E. Sanger, Donald Trump Sets Conditions for Defending NATO Allies Against Attack, *New York Times* (Online), 20 July 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/21/us/politics/donald-trump-issues.html>, retrieved on 13 July 2020; Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey's Coup Attempt and the World, *New York Times* (Online), 21 July 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/donald-trump-foreign-policy-interview.html?_r=0, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

prompted a debate about »European sovereignty«.³⁴ In May 2017, Chancellor Angela Merkel, usually seen as an Atlanticist, declared that Europe »must take its destiny into its own hands«. Others in Europe have gone further and called for Europeans to achieve »strategic autonomy«. The publication of a new US National Security Strategy in December 2017 further strengthened the perception among Europeans that they are on their own.³⁵

Some Atlanticists now see China not only as the most important challenge for the strategic West, but also as an opportunity to unite in response to a common threat as in the Cold War. As one participant in a recent discussion on transatlantic relations put it, »China will unite the West or Europe will be destroyed by it.«³⁶ There continue to be differences between Europeans, however, which in part reflect the different degrees and ways in which European countries are economically dependent on China. There is a growing consensus about the need to take a tougher approach to China on economic policy, which was reflected in a European Commission paper published in March 2019.³⁷ However, with the exception of France and the United Kingdom, Europeans are generally unwilling to take a stand against China on issues surrounding security in Asia.

Europe and the US are even more divided on Russia. There have long been differences between Europeans on how seriously to take the threat from Russia and how to

³⁴ See for example Carl Bildt, Trump's decision to blow up the Iran deal is a massive attack on Europe, Washington Post (Online), 12 May 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/05/12/trumps-decision-to-blow-up-the-iran-deal-is-a-massive-attack-on-europe/>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

³⁵ National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

³⁶ Participant at the Weimar Transatlantic Forum, Genshagen, 25–26 November 2019.

³⁷ European Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy, EU-China – A strategic outlook, Strasbourg, 12 March 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

respond to it. In particular, whereas the Baltic states and Poland were the most hawkish, southern European countries were the most conciliatory – and some, such as Greece and Italy, threatened to block EU sanctions against Russia. Germany positioned itself somewhere between these poles – and after the Ukraine crisis coordinated a compromise on sanctions against Russia. However, Trump's election and the ambiguities surrounding his approach to Putin created a new division within the US, which until then had been relatively united around a hawkish approach to Russia. More recently, President Macron proposed a new European security architecture involving Russia, which the Polish Prime Minister rejected as »irresponsible«.³⁸

These differences on Russia are complicated by the China challenge. Broadly, there are two views among foreign policy analysts on how to understand the relationship between China and Russia and how Europe and the US should deal with them. Some see China and Russia, along with Iran, as a joint threat to the West in normative and strategic terms.³⁹ Russia analysts, particularly in Poland and the US, worry that Russia is becoming a »junior partner« to China and point to military exercises, energy deals and cooperation on nuclear weapons between the two countries.⁴⁰

³⁸ Discours du Président de la République à la conférence des ambassadeurs, 27 August 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/08/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs-1>, retrieved on 13 July 2020; James Shotter, Poland's prime minister brands Macron irresponsible on Nato, Financial Times (Online), 10 November 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/aoa71b16-03a1-11ea-a984-fbbacad9e7dd>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

³⁹ See for example A. Wess Mitchell/Jakub Grygiel, The Vulnerability of Peripheries, *The American Interest*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (March 2011), pp. 5-16, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2011/03/01/the-vulnerability-of-peripheries/>, retrieved on 13 July 2020; Andrea Kendall-Taylor/David Schulman, How Russia and China Undermine Democracy, *Foreign Affairs* (Online), 2 October 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-10-02/how-russia-and-china-undermine-democracy>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

⁴⁰ See for example Michał Łubina, Russia and China: A political marriage of convenience – stable and successful, Berlin/Toronto: Barbara Budrich Verlag, 2017, pp. 160-190 and 283-295; Waław Radziwinowicz, Rosja staje się łodszym bratem Chin, *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Online), 17 August, <https://wyborcza.pl/naszaeuropa/7,168189,25083998,rosja-staje-sie-mlodszym-bratem->

Others, however, argue that Europe and the US should seek to reconcile with Russia in order to focus on China, which they see as a much bigger threat in the long term.⁴¹ This group includes not only realist foreign policy analysts who see the West primarily in strategic terms, but also those, like former Trump advisor Steve Bannon, who perceive it in cultural or civilisational terms.⁴²

chin.html, retrieved on 13 July 2020; Andrew Michta, Bipolarity is Back, The National Interest (Online), 17 January 2020, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2020/01/17/bipolarity-is-back/>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

⁴¹ Henry Kissinger is reported to have made this argument to President Trump. See Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian/Andrew Desiderio/Sam Stein/Asa-win Suebsaeng, Henry Kissinger Pushed Trump to Work With Russia to Box in China, Daily Beast, 31 July 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/henry-kissinger-pushed-trump-to-work-with-russia-to-box-in-china>, retrieved on 13 July 2020. See also Robert D. Blackwill, Implementing Grand Strategy Towards China. Twenty-Two Policy Prescriptions (Council Special Report No. 85), New York: Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), January 2020, pp. 35-36, https://cdn.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/CSR85_Blackwill_China.pdf, retrieved on 13 July 2020. For an early version of this argument, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, Strategic Vision. America and the Crisis of Global Power, New York: Basic Books, 2012.

⁴² Bannon often focused on »civilizational threats that face the US emanating from Arab world and China.« See Allen-Ebrahimian/Desiderio/Stein/Suebsaeng, Henry Kissinger Pushed Trump to Work With Russia to Box in China (see footnote no. 41). See also »Wir müssen uns zusammenschließen, sonst wird Europa ein Vasall Chinas« (Interview with Steve Bannon), Die Welt (Online), 1 June 2020, <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/plus208679195/Steve-Bannon-China-sollte-jedes-Corona-Opfer-weltweit-entschaedigen.html>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

IV. The Weimar countries and the transatlantic relationship

In this section, we briefly examine the different relationships of the three Weimar countries to the US and how they have responded to the election of President Donald Trump and the uncertainty about the US security guarantee to Europe that this has created. We can think of the three countries as lying on a spectrum from Atlanticist to »post-Atlanticist«. At the Atlanticist end is Poland, which has sought to strengthen relations with the US under President Trump. At the »post-Atlanticist« end is France, which has promoted the concept of European »strategic autonomy«. Germany, which is divided between Atlanticists and »post-Atlanticists«, is committed to the development of European defence cooperation while remaining sceptical about the idea of »strategic autonomy«.

Poland

Polish Atlanticism has a long history that goes back to the founding of the second Republic in 1918. After the collapse of Communism, Poles believed as much as others throughout the West in the »end of history« – and were quite oblivious to anti-American currents in France and Germany. The EU and NATO were seen as complementary elements of the West. This put Poland in a difficult position when tensions emerged between France and Germany on the one hand and the US on the other. When, along with other Central and Eastern European countries, Poland supported the US in the Iraq war, President Jacques Chirac famously said that it had missed »an opportunity to shut up«. Polish doubts about French and German foreign policy increased from 2014 onwards as a result of what was perceived as an ambivalent response to Russia's re-assertion of a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.

This background explains the way in which Poland has sought to work with President Trump. Poles fear that western Europeans see NATO's eastern flank as a dispensable periphery. This sentiment is deeply rooted

in the historical memory of abandonment by Britain and France in 1939, which is, as George Friedman put it, »seared« into the national mentality.⁴³ Doubts about the commitment of western Europeans have led the ruling Law and Justice Party government to view the idea of European »strategic autonomy« with suspicion and to seek an even closer bilateral relationship with the US, though the opposition is more open to the idea of a more assertive Europe and somewhat less trustful of President Trump's commitment to protecting US allies.⁴⁴ Attitudes towards the US remain positive compared to those elsewhere in Europe. According to the 2019 Polish-German barometer, 51 percent of Poles see the US as playing a positive role in global politics compared to 28 percent of Germans. Only 29 percent of Poles believe that Washington creates more tensions and conflicts compared to 66 percent of Germans.⁴⁵

France

France, by contrast, has long sought to build »Europe« as a counterweight to American power. Immediately after the US had opposed France and the UK in the Suez crisis, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer told

⁴³ George Friedman, *The Next Decade*, New York: Doubleday 2011, p. 134.

⁴⁴ These differences should not be overstated, however. For example, although Rafał Trzaskowski, the opposition's main candidate in the Polish 2020 presidential elections, has criticised Donald Trump for his anti-EU rhetoric, he has also said that Poland should try to increase the US military presence and described Polish-US relations as »the most important for Poland's security.« Trzaskowski: Też wypowiedzi Trumpa prezydent Duda nie powinien pominąć milczeniem, *Dziennik.pl*, 19 September 2018, <https://www.wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/581460.wizyta-prezydenta-dudy-w-usa-trump-trzaskowski-washington-polityka-polska-usa.html>, retrieved on 13 July 2020. Kai-Olaf Lang observes the following in his analysis of the bond between Warsaw and Washington: »The primacy of the USA is and will remain a constant in Polish security policy. (...) Possible changes of government in Warsaw will do little to change this« [translation by the authors]. Kai-Olaf Lang, *Polens unersetzbarer Partner*, (SWP-Aktuell 2019/A 37), Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), July 2019, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2019A37/>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

⁴⁵ Agnieszka Łada, *Wspólny kierunek – różne perspektywy. Polskie i niemieckie spojrzenia na wzajemne relacje, Europę oraz porządek światowy barometr Polska – Wspólny kierunek – różne perspektywy*, Warszawa: Fundacja Instytut Spraw Publicznych, 2019, p. 45.

President Charles de Gaulle that the only way that France could play a decisive role in the new environment dominated by the two superpowers was to unite to »build Europe«. »Europe will be your revenge«, Adenauer is supposed to have said.⁴⁶ Although it came from a West German, this idea of »Europe as revenge« has been particularly strong in French foreign policy. French doubts about the reliability of the US – and about whether US and European interests are aligned – have further increased over time. However, since 9/11, France and the US have often been aligned on elements of Middle East policy. In particular, France has worked closely with the US in combating terrorism, in the context of which the two countries' approaches have been much more closely aligned than either has been with Germany.

At the same time, however, French strategists were among the first to recognise the structural shift underway in US foreign policy away from Europe and towards Asia that began before Trump. Even during President's Obama administration, French officials urged Europeans to take greater responsibility for their own security. President Trump's election was therefore perhaps less of a strategic shock for France than for other European countries – and, because France has an independent nuclear deterrent, ultimately less of a danger. Especially since Emmanuel Macron's election as President in 2017, France has sought to promote the concept of European »strategic autonomy«. More recently, Macron has gone further in calling NATO »brain dead« – which recalls President Trump's description of the alliance as »obsolete« and illustrates that there is a kind of alignment between those in France and the US who believe that Europeans should not depend on the US for their security.⁴⁷ France has also been at the forefront of the

idea of »European sovereignty« and initiatives that would protect European companies against the secondary impact of US sanctions.

Germany

Germany's instincts are somewhere between Poland's Atlanticism and France's »post-Atlanticism«. During the Cold War, the Federal Republic depended on the US for protection against the then very real threat from the Soviet Union, and was staunchly Atlanticist – though there was also much anti-Americanism in West Germany, particularly on the left, which was expressed in opposition to the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s and to the stationing of US medium-range missiles in Germany in the 1980s. The US supported German reunification, and President George H.W. Bush spoke of a united Germany as a »partner in leadership«. However, relations worsened during the Iraq war, and since then there have been tensions between the two countries over economic issues such as Germany's current account surplus and its low level of defence spending, which successive US administrations have criticised. Levels of anti-Americanism have gone up and down, but the more important change is the fact that Germany does not feel threatened and is no longer dependent on the US in the way it was during the Cold War.

Since the election of President Trump, relations between Germany and the US have worsened dramatically as President Trump has attacked Germany in a kind of radicalised version of the criticisms of free riding in economic and security terms made by previous administrations, including the Obama administration.⁴⁸ The German strategic community is

⁴⁶ Christian Pineau, *Suez*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1976, p. 71.

⁴⁷ Transcript: Emmanuel Macron in his own words (English), *The Economist* (Online), 7 November 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-english>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

⁴⁸ See Hans Kundnani, *The New Parameters of German Foreign Policy*, Washington, DC: Transatlantic Academy, February 2017, <https://www.gmfus.org/file/25727/download>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

divided between Atlanticists and »post-Atlanticists«.⁴⁹ President Trump is extremely unpopular in Germany, however. According to one survey in 2019, nearly two thirds of Germans saw President Trump as more of a threat to global security than Vladimir Putin.⁵⁰ According to another recent survey, nearly 60 percent of Germans were in favour of putting further distance between Germany and the US while the majority of respondents saw China as a more reliable partner than the US.⁵¹ However, although Germans increasingly believe that Europeans must »take their fate into their own hands«, as Merkel put it, they are – unlike France – unwilling to do what it would take to make this a reality.

⁴⁹ See Hans Kundnani/Jana Puglierin, *Atlanticist and »Post-Atlanticist« Wishful Thinking*, Washington, DC: The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMFUS), 3 January 2018, <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/atlanticist-and-post-atlanticist-wishful-thinking>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

⁵⁰ *Zwei Drittel halten Trump für gefährlicher als Putin*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Online), 15 July 2018, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/international-zwei-drittel-halten-trump-fuer-gefaehrlicher-als-putin-dpa.urn-newsml-dpa-com-20090101-180715-99-159263>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

⁵¹ *Atlantik-Brücke, Vertrauen in der Krise. Landkarten geopolitischer Chancen und Risiken*, February 2019, p. 8, <https://www.atlantik-bruecke.org/wp-content/uploads/AtlantikBrueckeUmfrage2019.pdf>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

V.

Four scenarios for the future of the West

In this section of the paper, we imagine four possible scenarios for the future of the West in 2030. These scenarios are intuitive rather than based on a developed methodology involving specific drivers. In particular, they are based on current developments and the existing ideological and geographic fault lines between the Weimar countries as well as between them and the US that we have explored in this paper. It is also important to emphasise that the four scenarios outlined below are ideal-typical – i.e. it is possible that elements of two or more scenarios could coexist in a messier reality than is suggested here.

Scenario 1: The West survives

After President Trump leaves office in 2024, the West seems to snap back to its earlier form – i.e. not entirely without friction between Europeans and between Europeans and Americans, but relatively united around collective security in the North Atlantic area. The shock of President Trump's re-election in 2020 prompts Europeans to get more serious about their own security. In particular, Germany massively increases defence spending. Led by Germany, France and the United Kingdom (which has left the European Union, but is able to »plug in« to European defence initiatives), Europeans are able collectively to take on more of the burden for their own defence. They develop a kind of European pillar within NATO, which helps to save the Alliance. In short, there is a united Europe within a united West.

The West remains united on the basis of norms – above all, democracy. Centre-left and centre-right parties respond to the rise of »populism« by correcting some of the mistakes they had made in previous decades – in particular, the rise of inequality. Increasingly alarmed by the economic and strategic threat from China, Europeans take an increasingly tough approach that is aligned with that of the US. In particular, under pressure from the US, Europeans decouple their economies from China's to an increasing extent. Both Europe and the US also remain united around sanctions and deterrence against Russia. Thus Europe and the US together take a tough joint approach to China and Russia – against whom they increasingly define themselves and the »West«.

Scenario 2: Europe becomes »autonomous«

As it becomes increasingly clear that the US is shifting its attention and resources to Asia and is no longer committed to the security of Europe, even after President Trump leaves office in 2024 and is replaced by a Democratic president who reduces American troop deployments, Europeans finally unite around the concept of »strategic autonomy«. France had, of course, long believed in this idea. However, Germany and even Poland begin to gradually shift away from their previous commitment to Atlanticism to this vision of European security. NATO continues to exist, but is increasingly hollowed out. A serious debate starts about a European nuclear deterrent as the US fails to respond to increasingly aggressive Russian behaviour.

France, Germany and Poland are able to reach a new grand bargain linking economic, refugee and security questions that finally resolves the crises that began in the 2010s and reduces animosity between Europeans. As the European Union integrates further on the basis of this grand bargain, it increasingly defines itself in opposition to the US. In particular, the issue of climate change unites Europeans and divides them from the US. As China is increasingly seen as a more constructive partner on climate change, Europe triangulates between China and the US rather than instinctively aligning itself with the US – which China encourages by concluding a series of bilateral deals with Europeans. Thus while Europe is united, the West is divided.

Scenario 3: The West fragments

The West fragments as uncertainty about the US commitment to Europe continues and Europeans are unable to agree on how to respond to this uncertainty. France urges Europeans to move towards »strategic autonomy«. Poland and some other EU member states resist European initiatives, however, and increasingly reach bilateral deals with the US to enhance their own security. Meanwhile, though Germany continues to urge Europeans to take their fate into their own hands, it is concerned that »strategic autonomy« will produce exactly the US disengagement that it fears and refuses to significantly increase defence spending. Thus collective security in Europe becomes bilateralised – while some European countries such as Poland can depend on the US, others cannot.

Meanwhile, the EU is also unable to solve its own internal problems. The fault lines between debtor and creditor countries remain – and both become more dependent on non-Western powers, particularly China, either as a source of investment or as an export market. China and Russia exploit these vulnerabilities and further divide Europeans. The dependence of Europeans on non-Western powers, particularly China, also increases tensions with the US, which, as the world »de-globalises« and divides into two separate economic blocs, increasingly demands that Europeans choose between doing business with China or with the US. Europe thus becomes a secondary theatre in the strategic competition between China and the US.

Scenario 4: The »alt-West« emerges

Europe and the US remain united – but around a different set of values than had historically been the case. Led by President Trump and the European far right, a shift takes place towards a civilizational model (»clash of civilisations«) in which the West defines its identity primarily in opposition to Islam, but also to China. Far-right parties become more powerful in Europe – particularly after the continent faces a series of further refugee crises in the early 2020s. Centre-right parties in Europe come under increasing pressure from the far right and respond by either forming coalitions with far-right parties or adopting their ideas. Europe becomes a fortress – an approach justified in the name of a defence of »European values«. Some Atlanticists welcome this shift, however, because it keeps the West and its institutions together.

Disagreement within the West about the future of NATO persists, and in particular about how to handle Russia. Some argue that NATO should increasingly focus on what they see as the 21st century problems of migration and terrorism. They seek reconciliation with Russia, which they argue that, as a Christian country, should be brought into the fold of the West, and even included within the new NATO. They also argue that it makes strategic sense to peel Russia away from China, which is increasingly seen as a much greater threat to the West. Others, particularly in Poland, contend that NATO must continue to focus on its original mission of deterring Russia. They claim that Russia is not part of the West and point to the development of the strategic relationship between China and Russia.

Of the four scenarios described above, the future of the West seems most likely to resemble the third (the West fragments). This is because each of the other three is predicated on a degree of European and/or transatlantic unity that is difficult to achieve. In the first scenario (the West survives), Europe and the US remain united – roughly as they were during the Cold War. In the second scenario (Europe becomes »autonomous«), Europe and the US are divided, but at least Europe is united – in a sense, transatlantic disunity produces European unity. In the fourth scenario (the »alt-West« emerges), there is also a kind of Western unity, albeit around a set of values that believers in the »normative« project of the West would find abhorrent. However, in each case, if this kind of unity does not exist, the scenario collapses into the third one.

VI. The US election and transatlantic relations

A key variable that will shape transatlantic relations is the outcome of the US presidential election in November 2020. An administration led by Joe Biden would certainly feel very different compared with a second Trump administration. There is no doubt that it would seek to repair the US relationship with Europe. This would certainly be widely welcomed in Europe. However, Biden's election as President could tempt Europeans to see the Trump administration as an aberration rather than as an indication of a longer-term shift in US foreign policy. This could increase complacency in Europe – in particular about the need to take greater responsibility for security and spend more on defence. In a sense, therefore, a Biden administration could ultimately undermine the West rather than save it.

Meanwhile, many of the existing challenges in the transatlantic relationship would remain. An increasingly important policy area will be China policy, on which views have shifted decisively since 2016. For example, Democrats Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan write that the «era of engagement» with China has come to an end and there is new consensus around an approach based on the concept of «strategic competition».⁵² However, although there is a new consensus in Washington, it is far from clear that there is a transatlantic consensus. A Biden administration would certainly aim to work with Europeans to develop a transatlantic approach to China, but the differences discussed above will make this difficult. In particular, while Europeans may be prepared to take a tougher approach to China on economic issues, they are unlikely to join the US in strategic competition with China.

Differences over how to deal with Russia will also remain even if Biden becomes President. Led by a Democratic president, the US would once again revert to a straightforwardly hawkish posture towards Russia – though, as discussed above, while Trump's election as President created profound uncertainty about the US security guarantee, it did not lead to a withdrawal of the US from Europe as some had feared. However, the increasing focus of US foreign policy on China will put more pressure on Europeans to take greater responsibility for dealing with the threat from Russia – and thus discussions surrounding burden-sharing will continue, though presumably in a less fraught way than under Trump. Meanwhile, there will continue to be voices in Europe that prefer to seek an accommodation with Russia.

⁵² Kurt M. Campbell/Jake Sullivan, *Competition Without Catastrophe*, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 5 (September/October 2019), pp. 96-110, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/competition-with-china-without-catastrophe>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

VII.

The Weimar Triangle and European security

Whatever the outcome of the US presidential election in November, intra-European differences and, in particular, the differences between and within the Weimar countries discussed in this paper will remain important to the future of the West. This paper has shown how the three countries are divided on both the internal and the external dimensions of the crisis of the West. In both cases – i.e. on questions pertaining to »liberal overreach« and on the future of the strategic relationship with the US – Poland and France represent opposite poles in the current debate, with Germany somewhere in between. In other words, the prospects for Weimar – and by extension European – unity will depend to a large extent on whether Poland and France can reconcile their different views on the crisis of the West.

A particularly important area is security, in which the two countries have different approaches – as we have seen, Poland is the most Atlanticist and France the most »post-Atlanticist« of the three Weimar countries. The differences between them essentially revolve around whether European security should be guaranteed by Europeans with the US or by Europeans without the US. Whereas Poland has sought to bilateralise its relationship with the US, France has sought to develop European military capabilities outside the framework of NATO. A compromise between these two approaches could be a European pillar within NATO, which would make Europe somewhat more »autonomous« while at the same time keeping the US involved in European security.

Poland and France could also go some way to overcoming their differences on security by showing more commitment to, and interest in, protecting each other from the threats that they each see as being most important. For example, France could make a greater commitment to Operation Enhanced Forward

Presence.⁵³ In particular, as Benjamin Haddad has suggested, it might send a small number of troops to Poland as a gesture of solidarity – and as a way to demonstrate that Europeans can step up to defend their continent on their own.⁵⁴ Conversely, Poland could offer to deploy a small number of its troops to support French operations in Africa to show that it is not exclusively focused on the threat from Russia and takes French threat perceptions seriously.⁵⁵

However, although France and Poland seem to be on opposing sides of current debates about European security, they are, in another sense, more aligned with each other than either of them is with Germany. While France and Poland disagree on whether to deliver European security through the EU or NATO, many in both countries simply do not believe that Germany takes military power seriously at all. Before answering the question as to whether military capabilities should be deployed through the EU or NATO (or on ad hoc basis as in the intervention in Libya in 2013), you first need to have the capabilities and be willing to deploy them. In other words, as well as overcoming their own differences, France and Poland can join together in helping Germany go beyond rhetoric about »taking its destiny into its own hands« and make a greater commitment to European security.

⁵³ French troops are currently part of the British-led multinational battlegroup stationed in Estonia as part of Operation Enhanced Forward Presence.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Haddad, Emmanuel Macron's New Strategy is Disruption, Foreign Policy (Online), 11 December 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/11/nato-eu-emmanuel-macrons-new-strategy-is-being-a-jerk/>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

⁵⁵ Poland has also expressed considerable interest in joining the Franco-German project to develop a new main battle tank to replace the German Leopard II and the French Leclerc. See Jakub Pawłowski, Niemcy i Francja dzielą się czołgiem przyszłości, Defence 24, 28 April 2020, <https://www.defence24.pl/niemcy-i-francja-dziela-sie-czolgiem-przyszlosci-komentarz>, retrieved on 13 July 2020.

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Germany, France and Poland for Europe

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